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## The Meskhetian Turks' Issue in the Agenda of Cooperation between Georgia and International Organizations

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*The article examines the Meskhetian Turks' repatriation issue in Georgia's foreign policy. The analysis of the foreign policy run by the Georgian authorities allows to distinguish several stages of development. During the first stage, official Tbilisi, using international organizations' special attention to human rights, attempted to receive international donations through repatriation promises. Further, taking some steps towards the fulfillment of these promises, it minimized the number of Meskhetian Turks who returned to Georgia through delays and artificial obstacles. Official Tbilisi has succeeded in replacing the Meskhetian Turks' repatriation issue with that of adaptation of several thousand returned people in the agenda of cooperation with international organizations, which has become the ultimate goal of the final stage. By doing so, Georgia managed not only to effectively use this issue to address various problems, but also to neutralize the dangers that might have arisen if a large number of Meskhetian Turks returned to Georgia and settled in the bordering regions with Turkey.*

### Key words

The Meskhetian Turks, repatriation, foreign policy of Georgia, interests of Georgia, Euro-Atlantic institutions, the West.

### Introduction

The Meskhetian Turks are Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslims formed in the territory of modern Samtskhe and Javakheti. The question of the Meskhetian Turks' origin is a subject of active debates among researchers. Some researchers consider them as Islamized and Turkified Georgians<sup>1</sup>, preferring to call them Meskhs or Meskhetians.

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<sup>1</sup> ლომსაძე შ., სამცხე-ჯავახეთი (XVIII საუკუნის შუაწლებიდან XIX საუკუნის შუაწლებამდე), თბილისი, „მეცნიერება“, 1975, გვ. 280-

The others consider them as ethnic Turks<sup>2</sup>, using such terms as Turks or “Ahiska<sup>3</sup> Turks”. An in-depth study of their ethnogenesis allows to conclude that both Georgians and Turks, as well as representatives of other ethnic groups living in the region, including Armenians, participated in that process<sup>4</sup>.

The term "Meskhetian Turks" used in this article arose in the 1970s and spread over the 1980s. It was also adopted as a compromise term<sup>5</sup>, although it has not yet been widely used among Meskhetian Turks<sup>6</sup>.

In November 1944, all Meskhetian Turks residing in Adigeni, Akhaltsikhe, Aspindza, Akhalkalaki and Bogdanovka regions of the Georgian SSR were deported to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The total number of deportees was about 100000<sup>7</sup>. In

369; **მოღებაძე ვ.**, მესხური პრობლემის ანალიზი, „კალმოსანი“, თბილისი, 2010, გვ. 30-71; **Beridze M., Kobaidze M.**, An attempt to Create an Ethnic Group: Identity Change Dynamics of Muslimized Meskhetians, “Language, History and Cultural Identities in the Caucasus” conference, Malmö University, 2005., pp. 53-67; **Мамулия Г.**, Концепция государственной политики Грузии в отношении депортированных и репатриированных в Грузию месхов. История и современность - [https://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-02-1999/st\\_19\\_mamulija.shtml](https://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-02-1999/st_19_mamulija.shtml) (09.01.2019); **Гольдберг Г.**, О проблемах «турок-месхетинцев». (Исторический аспект) - [https://www.ca-c.org/journal/14-1998/st\\_09\\_goldberg.shtml](https://www.ca-c.org/journal/14-1998/st_09_goldberg.shtml) (20.02.2019).

<sup>2</sup> **Zeyrek Y.**, Ahıska bölgesi ve Ahıska Türkleri, Ankara, 2001, s. 6-40;

**Юнусов А.**, Ахыскинские (месхетинские) турки: дважды депортированный народ - [https://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-02-1999/st\\_20\\_junusov.shtml](https://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-02-1999/st_20_junusov.shtml) (09.01.2019).

<sup>3</sup> Ahıska is a Turkish name of Akhaltsikhe.

<sup>4</sup> **Գալղյան Կ.**, Մեսխեթի թուրքերի կազմավորումը Սամցխեի ու Ջավախքի ժողովրդագրական շարժի համապատկերում, *Էջմիածին*, 2018, ԺՄ, էջ 55-70:

<sup>5</sup> **Pentikäinen O., Trier T.**, Between Integration and Resettlement: The Meskhetian Turks, ECMI Working Paper # 21, Flensburg, 2004, 10, pp. 31-32.

<sup>6</sup> **Ахметьева В., Карастелев В., Юдина Н.**, Жизнь без прав. Положение ахыска-турок на юге России в 2015 году, доклад центра «Сова» и Московской Хельсинкской группы, Москва, 2015, с. 6.

<sup>7</sup> **Aydingün A., Harding C.B., Hoover M., Kuznetsov I., Swerdlow S.**, Meskhetian Turks An Introduction to their History, Culture and Resettlement Experiences, *Culture Profile*, 2006, 20, p. 6; **Modebadze V.**,

subsequent years, unlike most of other displaced peoples the Meskhetian Turks were not allowed to return to their former places of residence.

In 1989, the events in the Fergana region of the Uzbekistan SSR forced the Meskhetian Turks living in the republic to leave the country and to reside in the Russian Federation (North Caucasus and central regions), Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan and Ukraine<sup>8</sup>. In the current situation the issue of the repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks to Georgia, particularly to their former settlements became more urgent. A number of organizations of the Meskhetian Turks demanded from the government to allow them to return to their homes.

After the collapse of the USSR and the independence of the former soviet republics, the problem emerged in the focus of attention to Georgia, its neighboring countries and international structures, and had a series of ups and downs.

The goal of this article is to find out the pre-history of the solution of the Meskhetian Turks' repatriation issue, its place on the agenda of Georgia and international relations, the goals and achievements of Georgia's foreign policy in the development of this issue.

## **The repatriation issue of the Meskhetian Turks**

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, despite the existing challenges, the part of the Meskhetian Turks had managed to return to Georgia. The majority of them had to leave the territory of the Republic because of the abrupt deterioration of social and economic conditions in the country after gaining independence, as well as due to

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Historical Background of Meskhetian Turks' Problem and Major Obstacles to the Repatriation Process, IBSU Scientific Journal, 2009, 3, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Pentikäinen O., Trier T., Op. cit., pp. 11-12; Trier T., Tarkhan-Mouravi G., Kilimnik F., Meskhetians Homeward Bound... / ECMI - Caucasus, Georgia, 2001, p. 27; შოთაბერიძე ვ., Op. cit., გვ. 84-85; Ахметьева В., Карастелев В., Юдина Н., Op. cit., с. 5-6.

the atmosphere of nationalism (xenophobia) under the rule of Z. Gamsakhurdia and the civil war that started later<sup>9</sup>. Though during the early 90s the international community focused on the events happening in other countries of the former Soviet Union and socialist camp, in that period the issue of the Meskhetian Turks was not included in Georgia's foreign policy.

Recognition of Georgia and its affiliation to international institutions were among the numerous issues the *Gamsakhurdia* government faced. Regarding that issue he even applied with a request to E. Shevardnadze<sup>10</sup>, and getting no help, blamed the latter in his failures in the foreign policy<sup>11</sup>. The failed foreign policy made Gamsakhurdia to come forward with statements criticizing the West.

In March 1992, E. Shevardnadze came to power in Georgia. He considered that international community expected from Georgia readiness to conduct free elections and respect to the International Human Rights Principles<sup>12</sup>. To show the intention of establishing democracy in Georgia, he orders to set up "The Expatriation Commission of the deported Meskhetians", the members of which, after negotiations with the representatives of Krasnodar Krai, worked out the "Concept program on repatriation of the population deported from the Georgian SSR Meskheta and Javakheti in 1944"<sup>13</sup>, according to which the parties were to create relevant conditions for moving the Meskhetian Turks to Georgia in the second half of the year. Besides, in 1993, with the decree of the Georgian President, the Adaptation

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<sup>9</sup> **Swerdlow S.**, Understanding Post-Soviet Ethnic Discrimination and the Effective Use of U.S. Refugee Resettlement: The Case of the Meskhetian Turks of Krasnodar Krai, *California Law Review*, 6 (94), 2006, p. 1838;

**Мамулия Г.**, ἰπυῖ ἠβῆηηη; Теймураз Ломсадзе: "80-85% месхетинцев – фактически этнические грузины" - <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/25141402.html> (09.01.2019).

<sup>10</sup> **Шеварднадзе Э.**, Когда рухнул железный занавес, Москва, «Европа», 2009, с. 248-250.

<sup>11</sup> **Шеварднадзе Э.**, *Op. cit.*, с. 276-277.

<sup>12</sup> **Шеварднадзе Э.**, *Op. cit.*, с. 277.

<sup>13</sup> Деловая Грузия. Экономика и связи с Россией в 1999-2001гг., т. 1, Москва, 2002, с. 25.

Center for Georgian and Georgian History was established in Tbilisi, where the young Meskhetian Turks were given the opportunity to enter the country's universities<sup>14</sup>.

Dealing with the problems of the people exposed to violence by the Soviet authorities, undoubtedly, contributed to the reputation rise of the newly independent Georgia in front of the international community. During the following months, Georgia became known to many countries and hosted delegations from Germany, Russia, Iran and other countries. During the same period Georgia became a member of a number of organizations: In March 1992, Georgia joined the OSCE, in May it joined the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, in July Georgia became a member of the United Nations, and in September it affiliated with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

After reaching its political goals, Georgia's government forgot for some time about the issue of the Meskhetian Turks and did not take any practical step.

E. Shevardnadze's regime was not yet finally consolidated inside the country. In 1992-1993, in Western Georgia, the followers of the exiled president Gamsakhurdia periodically went on with their armed revolts. The unsuccessful military operations in Abkhazia, too, put E. Shevardnadze in a difficult position. In order to maintain his authority in the current situation, he chose the path of rapprochement with Russia and in 1993 Georgia became a CIS member, which received the negative response of Georgian society<sup>15</sup>.

Till 1996, Shevardnadze hoped to solve the problems he faced with the help of Russia. He managed to stabilize the internal political situation, but the rapprochement with Russia did not make significant changes in the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia's losses in the First Chechen War and the Khasavyurt Accord following it

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<sup>14</sup> Мамулия Г., *Op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Шеварднадзе Э., *Op. cit.*, с. 370-371; Маилян Б.В., Российско-грузинские отношения и вопрос членства Грузии в СНГ, «Историко-культурные основы социально-политической модернизации», Ереван, Российско-Армянский (Славянский) университет, 2012, с. 81-83.

seriously harmed Russia's reputation and caused changes in Georgia's foreign policy<sup>16</sup>. The government of Georgia again sought to strengthen the ties with the West.

### **The repatriation issue of the Meskhetian Turks in the cooperation agenda of Georgia and international organizations**

In May 1996, the declaration of the Regional Conference addressing the problems of refugees, displaced persons, the other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighboring States<sup>17</sup>, taken place on the initiative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), recognized the right of the deported peoples to return to their settlements. Taking advantage of this circumstance, E. Shevardnadze once again tried to use the repatriation issue of the Meskhetian Turks in favor of his foreign policy. He signed the decree "On approval of the state program on solving the legal and social issues of deported and repatriated Meskhetians in Georgia"<sup>18</sup>, among the objectives of which were the granting of citizenship, restoration of the nationality and surname,

<sup>16</sup> **Маилян Б.В.**, *Op. cit.*, с. 85-86.

<sup>17</sup> Regional Conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighbouring States (Geneva, 30-31 May, 1996) - <https://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/microsites/rcps/cis-conference/CIS%20Declaration%20POA%20Regional%20Conference%201996.pdf> (23.02.2019).

<sup>18</sup> დეპორტირებული და საქართველოში რეპატრიირებული მესხების სამართლებრივ და სოციალურ პრობლემათა გადაჭრის სახელმწიფო პროგრამის დამტკიცების შესახებ საქართველოს პრეზიდენტის ბრძანებულება -

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/109186?publication=0> (23.02.2019); Деловая Грузия, *Op. cit.*, с. 25.

providing of economic privileges based on the current legislation, ensuring of social protection and the assistance in integration into society. Among the repatriation funding sources along with the budgets of the Georgian state and local self-government bodies were mentioned the financial means received on the basis of the agreements with international organizations and stakeholders. For implementation of the announced, a state committee was set up headed by the Minister of Refugees and Resettlement V. Vashakidze. Practically, this decree did not produce any result. It created a pretext before the international community for solving the problems inherited from the Soviet authorities, which would leave a positive impression. At the same time, one of the goals of the document was the change of the repatriates' nationality and surnames, which, in fact, was for avoiding criticism from the Georgian community, because the prospect of the Meskhetian Turks' return was accepted negatively.

The law "On the victims of political repressions and restoration of justice"<sup>19</sup> adopted in December 1997, though bypassed the Meskhetian Turks, but attached importance to building of a legal state, the supreme values of which must be the human life, inviolability and freedom of the person. In fact, this law was the continuation of the foreign policy Georgia had adopted and was aimed at presenting it in the West as a country with European values.

The concept on Georgia's public life conditions, establishment of state sovereignty and security and on territorial integrity restoration<sup>20</sup>, adopted in 1997, put forward the country's western orientation provisions. Russia's role in the history of Georgia was

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<sup>19</sup> საქართველოს კანონი საქართველოს მოქალაქეთა პოლიტიკური რეპრესიების მსხვერპლად აღიარებისა და რეპრესირებულთა სოციალური დაცვის შესახებ - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/31408?publication=11> (23.02.2019).

<sup>20</sup> საქართველოს საზოგადოებრივი ცხოვრების მდგომარეობის, სახელმწიფოებრივი სუვერენიტეტისა და უსაფრთხოების განმტკიცების, ტერიტორიული მთლიანობის აღდგენის კონცეფცია - [http://www.parliament.ge/files/387\\_616\\_475426\\_38.pdf](http://www.parliament.ge/files/387_616_475426_38.pdf) (23.02.2019).

negatively assessed in the document. Regarding the issue of Europe's security, an importance was attached to NATO's role, and the expansion of the military unit was welcomed. The constructive activity of the European institutions was consistently presented in the concept.

After calming down of the country's internal political situation, the West began to look upon Georgia as a transit state of transportation of energy resources from the Caspian basin. As a result, in 1996-1997, the Tbilisi airport, the railways, the communication facilities were restored, the Baku-Supsa pipeline was built and the gradual implementation of TRACECA multilateral cooperation program started. In 1996, Georgia and EU signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement<sup>21</sup>.

Taking into account that the West is interested in Georgia, the government displayed a willingness to make concessions in the issue of the Meskhetian Turks' repatriation in order to join the western political, economic and military institutions.

In the 1990s, the issue of the Meskhetian Turks appeared in the focus of attention of official Ankara, with the efforts of which the repatriation issue was raised in the OSCE<sup>22</sup> as well. On the initiative of the OSCE and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, consultations on the issue of the Meskhetian Turks were conducted in 1998 in Hague and in 1998 in Vienna. The representatives of Georgia, Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and the Meskhetian Turks living in those countries and Vatan<sup>23</sup> organization attended it. The aim of the consultations was the

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<sup>21</sup> Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) - [http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/2\\_Partner\\_cce01fcf.pdf](http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/2_Partner_cce01fcf.pdf) (23.02.2019).

<sup>22</sup> Арис Казинян: Грузия и американо-турецкий проект по возвращению турок-месхетинцев: история и реальность - <https://regnum.ru/news/671851.html> (23.02.2019).

<sup>23</sup> Vatan (homeland) is one of the largest and most recognized organizations of the Meskhetian Turks, demanding from the Georgian authorities to allow them to return to the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. The organization was founded in 1990 in Moscow and is represented in the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan.



discussion of the issue and the attempt of regulating the existing issues<sup>24</sup>.

For joining the Council of Europe as a result of the consultations, a provision on organizing the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks was also included in Georgia's commitments. According to paragraph 10.2 of Georgia's application for the Council of Europe membership, the Georgian parliament had to create a legislative basis for the return of the Meskhetian Turks within two years of joining the organization, after which the repatriation process would start within 3 years and end in 12 years<sup>25</sup>. In parallel with the membership of the Council of Europe, Georgia chose the path of non-participation in integration processes in the post-Soviet space and weakening of the military and political ties with Russia.

The deepening of the relations with European supranational structures enabled to solve that issue as well. In 1999, Georgia announced about leaving the CIS<sup>26</sup>, and at the OSCE summit held in Istanbul in November Georgia managed to come to an agreement with Russia on the withdrawal of the Russian troops from its territory<sup>27</sup>.

After the affiliation to the Council of Europe and obtaining of the agreement on the withdrawal of the Russian troops from its territory, Georgian authorities again "forgot" about the issue of the Meskhetian Turks.

In 2001, in the resolution on fulfilling the commitments and obligations of Georgia the Council of Europe called on the country's

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<sup>24</sup> **Trier T., Tarkhan-Mouravi G., Kilimnik F.**, Op. cit., pp. 37-40.

<sup>25</sup> Georgia's application for membership of the Council of Europe - <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=16669&lang=en> (23.02.2019).

<sup>26</sup> **Мачавариани Г.Г.**, Внешняя политика Грузии на Южном Кавказе (1991-2016гг.), Дис. канд. ист. наук, Москва, 2017, с. 56.

<sup>27</sup> OSCE Istanbul Document 1999, pp. 49, 252 -

<https://www.osce.org/mc/39569?download=true> (25.02.2019); **Маилян Б.В.**, Op. cit., с. 85.

authorities to speed up the process of repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks, including the legal expertise of the law<sup>28</sup>.

Under the pressure of Turkey and international community, a bill on repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks was developed in Georgia, which on the whole received a positive response by the Council of Europe experts<sup>29</sup>. Despite this, during E. Shevardnadze's rule, as contrary to the authorities' promises, the bill did not enter to the parliament's agenda.

Georgia's authorities conditioned the dragging of the process by the country's poor social and economic conditions and by the issue of the great number of inner displaced persons as a result of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia<sup>30</sup>. For the settlement of these issues, Tbilisi expected the multilateral financial support of the European structures, which had been mentioned in the president's decree still in 1996.

After the Rose Revolution of Georgia in 2003, M. Saakashvili's government began to pursue a more accented pro-Western foreign policy. One of the most important directions of Georgia's foreign policy became the affiliation to the Euro-Atlantic structures, which was established in the National Security Concept of Georgia<sup>31</sup> adopted in 2005. As in the previous period, new authorities too addressed the issue of the Meskhetian Turks.

Saakashvili's administration considered the issues of the internally displaced persons, as well as the poor social and economic conditions in the country, especially in Samtskhe–Javakheti, among the main obstacles to the Meskhetian Turks' return to Georgia<sup>32</sup>. State Minister for Conflict Settlement in Georgia, G. Khaindrava stated

<sup>28</sup> Honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia - <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=16941&lang=en> (22.03.2019).

<sup>29</sup> Деловая Грузия, *Op. cit.*, с. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Деловая Грузия, *Op. cit.*, с. 26.

<sup>31</sup> საქართველოს ეროვნული უსაფრთხოების კონცეფცია (2005) - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/43156?publication=0> (25.02.2019).

<sup>32</sup> **Modebadze V.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

about this issue immediately after his visit to Turkey in April, noting that Turkey is ready to provide financial assistance<sup>33</sup>. In fact, at this stage the Georgian authorities tried to use the repatriation issue of the Meskhetian Turks not only to present themselves as a country protecting democracy and the universal human rights, but also to receive financial support to carry out economic reforms in the country. Among the obstacles in the issue of organizing repatriation, the Georgian side also pointed out the "Armenian factor"<sup>34</sup>. Although the mass resettlement of the Meskhetian Turks in Samtskhe-Javakheti could have undesirable consequences for Armenia and Javakhk-Armenians, Armenian authorities had not officially declared their position, and in Javakhk people complained of the pressures on the Armenians by Georgian authorities by speculation of the issue<sup>35</sup>. The talks on moving the Meskhetian Turks to the Armenian-populated regions did not come true. Essentially, in Tbilisi the danger of using the Meskhetian Turks by Turkey for their political purposes was considered more threatening, and as it turned out, they tried to avoid populating that region with the Meskhetian Turks.

After the regime change, the European international institutions continued to exert pressure on the Georgian government. Along with the criticism of the discriminatory policy of the local authorities in Krasnodar region (Krasnodar Krai) of the Russian Federation in the resolution adopted by the Council of Europe in February 2005, the policy run by the Georgian authorities was

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<sup>33</sup> ხაინდრავა მამადიანი მესხების რეპატრიაციის შესახებ საუბრობს - <https://old.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=12432> (25.02.2019);  
**Շաքարյան Ա.**, Մեսխեթի թուրքեր. Աշխարհաքաղաքական գործն տարածաշրջանում, Թուրքագիտական և օսմանագիտական հետազոտություններ, «Ասողիկ», Երևան, 2006, էջ 74:

<sup>34</sup> **Modebadze V.**, Op. cit., p. 123-125; **Оганесян А.**, Политика Турции и Грузии в отношении проблем турок-месхетинцев, Կանթեղ գիտական հոդվածների ժողովածու, 2001, 3, էջ 173:

<sup>35</sup> Армяне Джавахети обвиняют власти Грузии в противоправных действиях - <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/78636/> (26.02.2019).

criticized as well. The Council of Europe called on the Georgian government to respect and fulfill its commitments to membership in the institution, to adopt the bill already approved by the experts of the Council of Europe, to organize the repatriation process of the Meskhetian Turks wishing to return to Georgia and to present distinctly developed programs to get financial support for that purpose, in developing of which it was necessary to take into account the needs of the repatriates<sup>36</sup>. In the resolution adopted in 2006, the Georgian authorities were to follow the aforementioned recommendations<sup>37</sup>.

In 2005-2006, active discussions of the bill still drafted during Shevardnadze's government took place. In the course of the discussions, Georgia's position on the population of the repatriated Meskhetian Turks became more emphasized, which led to great dissatisfaction among them<sup>38</sup>.

As a result, in July 2007 the Georgian parliament adopted the law "On repatriation of persons forcefully resettled from Georgian SSR by the Soviet Union in the 40s of 20<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>39</sup>. In the issue of creating relevant legal bases for repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks the Georgian government also adopted the decision "On simplified procedure of granting Georgian citizenship to those who have a

<sup>36</sup> The situation of the deported Meskhetian population - <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17312&lang=en> (22.03.2019).

<sup>37</sup> Implementation of Resolution 1415 (2005) on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia - <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17398&lang=en> (22.03.2019).

<sup>38</sup> Арис Казинян: Грузия и американо-турецкий проект по возвращению турок-месхетинцев: история и реальность - <https://regnum.ru/news/671851.html> (23.02.2019).

<sup>39</sup> საქართველოს კანონი ყოფილი სსრკ-ის მიერ XX საუკუნის 40-იან წლებში საქართველოს სსრ-იდან იძულებით გადასახლებულ პირთა რეპატრიაციის შესახებ - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/22558?publication=7> (26.02.2019).

status of a repatriated person”<sup>40</sup>. Thus, there were already legislative basis for repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks, and the process was to begin in 2008 and end in 2011. The adoption of those documents was largely due to the pressure of European supranational institutions and Turkey, though, it is interesting that it coincided with the abrupt deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations in 2006-2007.

The adoption of the law by the Georgian authorities in the resolution of the Council of Europe received a positive response in 2008 and required further implementation<sup>41</sup>. But the repatriation law adopted by the parliament also received sharp criticism. The main issues pointed out were the artificial complication of the admission of applications and the shortage of the time frames<sup>42</sup>. In December 2008, the Georgian parliament extended the deadline for the submission of the *application* up to July 1, 2009<sup>43</sup>. The parliamentary and

<sup>40</sup> რეპატრიანტის სტატუსის მქონე პირთა მიერ საქართველოს მოქალაქეობის გამარტივებული წესით მიღების შესახებ საქართველოს მთავრობის დადგენილება - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4096?publication=0> (26.02.2019)

<sup>41</sup> Honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia - <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17629&lang=en> (22.03.2019)

<sup>42</sup> **Trier T., Tarkhan-Mouravi G., Kilimnik F.**, Op. cit., p. 46; **Усманов А.О.**, К вопросу о конституционно-правовой реабилитации месхетинских турок: политико-правовой аспект, *Гуманитарные и юридические исследования*, 2017, 3, с. 163; Теймураз Ломсадзе: "80-85% месхетинцев – фактически этнические грузины" - <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/25141402.html> (09.01.2019); Закон Грузии «О репатриации»: достоинства и недостатки - <http://newcaucasus.com/society/13095-zakon-gruzii-o-repatriatsii-dostoins.html> (22.03.2019); Информационная кампания по грузинскому закону о репатриации в Краснодарском крае - <http://old.memo.ru/hr/discrim/meshi5/mom.html> (22.03.2019).

<sup>43</sup> საქართველოს კანონი „ყოფილი სსრკ-ის მიერ XX საუკუნის 40-იან წლებში საქართველოს სსრ-იდან იძულებით გადასახლებულ პირთა რეპატრიაციის შესახებ“ საქართველოს კანონში დამატებისა და ცვლილებების შეტანის თაობაზე - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/90742?publication=0> (27.02.2019).

presidential elections in Georgia as well as the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 were pointed out as reasons for extension of the term, whereas only war operations from the above-mentioned events could be a significant obstacle.

Those events were followed by the adoption of the Declaration on Eastern Partnership and development of Georgia's EU integration within its framework<sup>44</sup>. It should be noted that in the relations with the European Union the Meskhetian Turks' repatriation issue did not receive any response.

In 2011, the term envisaged for repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks expired. According to the Georgian side, 5841 applications (approximately 8900 people) were registered in Georgian embassies of different countries till 2011, 1700 of whom received a status of a repatriated person, which was criticized by international institutions<sup>45</sup>. In those documents, Georgian authorities were accused of avoiding their commitments. The process of repatriation and the law adopted for its organization was also criticized in Georgia<sup>46</sup>, even though Georgian media was accused of avoiding the issue or presenting it in a negative tone<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit - [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009\\_eap\\_declaration.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009_eap_declaration.pdf) (27.02.2019).

<sup>45</sup> Written statement on repatriation of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia, submitted by the NGO Federal Union of European Nationalities - [https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1236549/1930\\_1443084042\\_g1520228.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1236549/1930_1443084042_g1520228.pdf) (27.02.2019); Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution, "Honouring of Obligations and commitments by Georgia" - [http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2010/20100624\\_amondoc24rev\\_2010.pdf](http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2010/20100624_amondoc24rev_2010.pdf) (27.02.2019).

<sup>46</sup> მაჰმადიანი მესხების რეპატრაციის საკითხები - <https://ge.boell.org/ka/2011/11/02/mahmadiani-mesxebis-repatriaciis-sakitxebi> (22.03.2019); რეპატრაციის შესახებ კანონის დასამარება - <http://toleranti.ge/index.php/ka/2017-11-06-08-22-47/32-2017-11-06-09-32-10> (22.03.2019); სტატუსით დაბრუნებულები - <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/24286762.html> (22.03.2019).

<sup>47</sup> სტერეოტიპები რეპატრირებული მესხების მიმართ ქართულ მედიაში - <http://www.media.ge/ge/portal/news/46610/> (22.03.2019).

The steps taken by Georgia were welcomed in PACE resolution<sup>48</sup> adopted in the same year and the authorities of the country were advised to analyze the received applications, to demonstrate flexibility and not to reject applications on technical ground only, as well as to develop effective mechanisms for repatriation and integration as soon as possible.

The "Georgian Dream", which came to power in Georgia in 2012, does not express its position on repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks and avoids that topic. It indicates that the current authorities agree with their predecessors' policy and do not want to be involved in the long-term discussion of the issue.

There is no mention of the Meskhetian Turks in the Association Agreement<sup>49</sup> signed with the EU on 30 August, 2014. In fact, Tbilisi eventually bypassed the issue, which was speculated by Georgia to be integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures in the beginning and then imposed by European international organizations. In building relations with the EU, Georgia managed to leave one of the undesirable topics out of the scope of discussion.

Nevertheless, on September 12 of the same year, the government decree on the Meskhetian Turks' repatriation strategy<sup>50</sup> was adopted in Georgia, which applies only to those who already received the status of a repatriate or was granted citizenship, that is, a very limited number of people. The adopted strategy has two directions: return and integration. It is noteworthy that for the first

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<sup>48</sup> The honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia - <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17976&lang=en> (22.03.2019).

<sup>49</sup> Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part - [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830(02)) (22.03.2019).

<sup>50</sup> საქართველოს მთავრობის განკარგულება ყოფილი სსრკ-ის მიერ XX საუკუნის 40-იან წლებში საქართველოს სსრ-იდან იძულებით გადასახლებულ პირთა რეპატრაციის შესახებ სახელმწიფო სტრატეგიის დამტკიცების შესახებ - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2509406?publication=0> (22.03.2019).

time in this document the Georgian authorities intended to provide repatriates with information in a language understandable to them, as well as to promote the preservation of cultural identity. Clear mechanisms for achieving the goals set out in the document were missing and should be developed later. The project implementation should be financed by donor organizations.

The adoption of the document got positive feedback in the resolution<sup>51</sup> on the work of democratic institutions in Georgia adopted by PACE in 2015. At the same time, it is noted that the Georgian authorities delay to grant citizenship after granting repatriate's status. The adoption of the Georgian government's decision on repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks mitigated the critic in the PACE resolution, though the issue of granting citizenship will continue to be further discussed. However, it is important for Georgia that the problem was narrowed down and it is no longer related to the Meskhetian Turks in general, but to just a small group in Georgia.

Some political circles in Georgia consider that the strategy should have been adopted much earlier, as well as rehabilitation and adaptation centers should have been founded<sup>52</sup>, but it could be stated that official Tbilisi managed to neutralize one of the most complicated issues in the cooperation agenda with international organizations.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the emergence of the issue of the Meskhetian Turks' repatriation, the process of its involvement in the cooperation agenda of international organizations and Georgia, the attempts to solve it, as well as the policy of the Georgian authorities, show that

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<sup>51</sup> The functioning of democratic institutions in Georgia - <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=21275&lang=en> (22.03.2019).

<sup>52</sup> მესხების დაბრუნება - სახელმწიფო სტრატეგია დამტკიცებულია (მ. არემიძეს ინტერვიუ) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NchJ7ia0ysA> (23.03.2019).



1. The repatriation issue of the Meskhetian Turks was important for Georgia in several aspects. Firstly, the settlement of a large number of Turkish-speaking and Muslim people would further complicate the demographic situation in the country. The settlement of these people in the regions close to the border with Turkey was fraught with other dangerous developments. Nevertheless, in case of right policy, the Georgian authorities could use this problem in their foreign policy to strengthen their positions in the international relations.
2. Georgia's foreign policy can be divided into three stages after the issue appeared on the agenda of international organizations. At the first stage, Georgia showed its interest in solving the problem in order to form a democratic image of a country interested in protecting human rights and transforming the potential difficulty in integration into European international organizations to a favorable factor.
3. At the second stage, when decisions promoting the repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks were to be adopted and implemented, Georgia's steps were marked by sluggishness and inertia. As a result, only a few thousand Meskhetians were registered and moved to Georgia.
4. At the third stage, which is still under implementation, Georgia succeeded in replacing the problem of repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks on the agenda of international relations with the issue of adaptation of several thousand Meskhetian Turks who applied for return. It is noteworthy that there is no reference to the issue of the Meskhetian Turks in the Association Agreement signed with EU in 2014.